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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: April 28, 1953

SUBJECT: Guatemalan Situation

PARTICIPANTS: Colonel Roberto Barrios Peña, Guatemalan Opposition Leader
HD - Mr. Leddy
Mr. Fisher

COPIES TO: American Embassy, Guatemala (Informally)
American Embassy, San Salvador (Informally)
ARA
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Colonel Barrios Peña said he came to Washington from El Salvador to apprise the Department of State of the serious turn events were taking in Central America. He said any attempt to exert direct pressure on Guatemala from the outside would have the effect of uniting all the Guatemalan people behind Arbenz, and would enlist the sympathy of important numbers of other Central Americans. He said this was already evident in El Salvador where many Salvadorans have reacted to Osorio's truculence toward Guatemala with expressions of solidarity with the Guatemalans. Colonel Barrios Peña said that the withdrawal of Guatemala from ODECA had left that organ helpless, and any sign of activity against Guatemala on its part will be useful to the Guatemalan Government in its propaganda campaign against alleged intervention in Guatemala by Yankee imperialists using Central American puppet governments.

Colonel Barrios Peña said the state of mind of the Guatemalan leaders was approaching a point of hysteria, and they were deliberately isolating Guatemala from the neighboring governments in a frenzy of spite, but were at the same time making an effective appeal for sympathy in Latin American public opinion. He said Guatemala was being used both by the USSR and by Mexico, each nation having its own reasons for desiring unrest and intensified anti-American feeling in Central America. He said Mexico was supplying arms to the Guatemalan Army.

Colonel Barrios Peña said the only solution to the Guatemalan problem was a successful revolt from within the country. He said he was connected with

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with a large-scale project to overthrow the Government, with organized branches in numerous localities inside Guatemala. He said that originally an uprising was planned for April 6 but that lack of coordination resulted in the abortive and isolated attempt in Salamá by 18 of the organization's good men. He said 12 of them had been caught and shot, and 200 hard-to-replace rifles were seized at El Progreso. He said the Guatemalans have absolutely no evidence to support their wild charges of foreign intervention; that there were no airplanes coming to anyone's assistance and there were no arms which could be traced to any other government. He said the blame for the miscarriage of the planned revolt went to Carlos Simons who was now in El Salvador. He said the incident has been used by the Guatemalans to round up many leaders of the opposition, and has set back their plans considerably.

Colonel Barrios Peña emphasized that the leaders of the other Central American countries were stupid to concern themselves with any aggressive plan against Guatemala; that their own governments were in fact liable to be overthrown at any moment. He said there were far more Communists in Salvador than in Guatemala. He said the families of the 10,000 individuals killed by Martinez in 1932 have never forgotten or forgiven. He added that there were cadres of the Caribbean Legion in Salvador and Honduras, ready to mobilize against the governments of those countries at the opportune moment. He observe that the secretary to President Galvez was Pochito Morazan, brother of Francisco Morazan, Caribbean Legionaire and secretary to President Arbenz. Colonel Barrios claimed he had recently spoken to President Osorio of El Salvador and warned him against trying to put out the neighboring fire while his own house was about to go up in flames. Colonel Barrios said he hoped to fly to Miami tonight and would probably see President Batista in Havana before returning to Central America.

Colonel Barrios Peña said that, although it had not appeared in the newspapers, the Salvadoran Ambassador to Guatemala, Colonel Funes, had been arrested by the Guatemalans and was to be tried for attempting to supply arms to the opposition in Guatemala.

Colonel Barrios said that the focal point of Communist activity in Latin America was not Guatemala but Mexico. The Soviet and Satellite diplomatic missions there provided the link with the USSR.

According to Colonel Barrios Peña, a tremendous demonstration against the United States will take place in Guatemala City on May 1, which will have a strong nationalistic theme aimed at arousing sympathy throughout the hemisphere.

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